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Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SSO-00

EUR-12 DHA-02 DPW-01 IO-10 SCS-03 SCA-01 AID-05 OMB-01

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---------- 103406
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9764
INFO AMCONGEN HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK
CINCPAC HONOLULU
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 17078

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, VS, CASC
SUBJECT: COMMENTS OF AMERICAN PHYSICIAN JUST RELEASED FROM
PRISON IN CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

SUMMARY: ON 15 AUGUST, DR. GEORGE P. CHRISTIAN, AN AMERICAN PHYSICIAN FROM BOSTON, MASS. WAS EXPELLED FROM SOUTH VIETNAM AFTER BEING IMPRISONED IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS SINCE LATE MARCH 1975 ALONG WITH A COLLEAGUE, NEW ZEALANDER EDRIC BAKER. BOTH MEN, DOCTORS AT THE KONTUM HOSPITAL RUN BY DR. PAT SMITH OF SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, STAYED AT THEIR HOSPITAL WHEN KONTUM FELL TO THE PRG FORCES ON 18 MARCH. CHRISTIAN REPORTED THAT ALL TRIBAL PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ORDERED OUT OF KONTUM BACK TO THEIR RESPECTIVE VILLAGES AND THAT THE AMERICAN HOSPITAL IN KONTUM HAS BEEN TAKEN OVER BY PRG AUTHORITIES AND MEMBERS OF THE STAFF HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. A FRENCH PRIEST TOLD DR. CHRISTIAN THAT, IN MID-JULY THERE WERE
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8 OR 9 AMERICANS IN PLEIKU, SIX OF WHOM WERE MISSIONARIES.

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END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY OFFICERS MET DR. CHRISTIAN AT AIRPORT. HE IS SUFFERING FROM A SERIOUS BACK AILMENT AND WAS CARRIED OUT OF HIS JUNGLE PRISON CAMP FOR 38 KILOMETERS ON 11 AUGUST ON A LITTER. DR. CHRISTIAN SAID THAT HE STAYED IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS TOWN OF KONTUM AFTER ARVN SPECIAL FORCES BLEW UP THEIR AMMO STOCKS AND FLED ON 18 MARCH. ARRIVING PRG FORCES ALLOWED HIM TO CONTINUE HIS WORK IN THE KONTUM HOSPITAL ALONG WITH DR. EDRIC BAKER, ACTING HOSPITAL DIRECTOR, A NEW ZEALANDER. ON 27 MARCH BOTH MEN WERE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AND REMOVED UNDER GUARD TO A PRISON CAMP NEAR THE TOWN OF KON KOLA IN KONTUM PROVINCE ABOUT 80 KILOMETERS FROM KONTUM AND ABOUT 40 KILOMETERS FROM DAK TO.

2. DOCTORS CHRISTIAN AND BAKER WERE CONFINED IN A PRG PRISON CAMP ALONG WITH ABOUT 200 FORMER GVN MILITARY AND CIVIL OFFICIALS. THE PHYSICIANS WERE KEPT APART FROM THE OTHER PRISONERS AND WERE NOT PHYSICALLY HARMED. THE MEN HAD LITTLE CONTACT WITH OUT-SIDERS BUT WERE PERMITTED SEVERAL VISITORS FROM KONTUM WHO TOLD THEM THAT ALL WAS WELL AT THEIR HOSPITAL.

3. ON 11 AUGUST BOTH DOCTORS WERE TOLD THEY WERE BEING RELEASED AND WERE ESCORTED OVERLAND 40 KILOMETERS TO DAK TO. DR. CHRISTIAN WAS CARRIED BY MONTAGNARD PRISONERS AND DR. BAKER WALKED. THEY WERE TAKEN BY CAR FROM DAK TO TO KONTUM WHERE THEY MET SEVERAL FRENCH MISSIONARIES INCLUDING THE BISHOP OF KONTUM, FATHER PAUL SEITZ. FROM THE FRENCH THE TWO LEARNED THAT PRG AUTHORITIES HAD ARRESTED NUMEROUS HOSPITAL WORKERS AT KONTUM AND HAD BLAMED THE AMERICAN HOSPITAL STAFF OF USING THE HOSPITAL AS A COVER FOR INTELLIGNECE OPERATIONS IN VIETNAM.

4. A FRENCH PRIEST, FATHER DUJEAN, TOLD CHRISTIAN ON 11 AUGUST THAT THERE WERE 8 OR 9 AMERICANS BEING HELD BY THE PRG IN PLEIKU. HE SAID THAT SIX OF THESE WERE MISSIONARIES AND THAT HE HAD BEEN GIVEN THE INFOR-MATION IN MID-JULY BY A PRG SOLDIER WHO WAS IMMEDIATELY CONFIDENTIAL

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TOLD BY A COLLEAGUE TO BE QUIET.

5. THE TRIBAL PEOPLE, WHO CONSTITUTED THE MAJORITY OF THE PTPULATION OF KONTUM DURING THE WAR, HAVE ALMOST ALL BEEN SENT BACK TO THEIR VILLAGES BY PRG AUTHORITIES. DR. CHRISTIAN REPORTED HEARING IN MID-JUNE OF THE DEATH OF SEVERAL MONTAGNARDS AFTER THEY OPENED FIRE ON A GROUP OF PRG SOLDIERS, WERE CAPTURED, AND EXECUTED.

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HE ALSO WAS TOLD OF THE SUMMARY EXECUTION OF SEVERAL GVN POLICE OFFICIALS IN KONTUM SHORTLY AFTER THE FALL OF THE CITY.

6. THE DOCTORS WERE TAKEN BY CAR FROM KONTUM TO SAIGON BETWEEN 11-14 AUGUST. DR. CHRISTIAN SAID THAT THE TRIP WAS UNEVENTFUL BUT THAT THERE WAS STILL EXTENSIVE WAR DAMAGE TO BE SEEN IN THE QUI NHON AREA AND THAT RECONSTRUCTION HAD NOT YET BEGUN. HE SAID THAT EVERY VILLAGE HAD SECURITY CHECK POINTS BUT THAT LIFE IN THE VILLAGES SEEMED NORMAL. HE SAID THE PORT OF CAM RANH APPEARED TO HAVE LITTLE SHIPPING ACTIVITY. BETWEEN QUI KHNON AND NHA TRANG THEIR CAR PASSED A CONVOY OF 15-20 TRUCKS LOATED WITH PRG SOLDIERS HEADING SOUTH. OTHER THAN THAT HE SAW RELATIVELY FEW SOLDIERS.

7. IN SAIGON THE DOCTORS WERE THE ONLY GUESTS AT THE CARAVELLE HOTEL ON THE NIGHT OF 14 AUGUST. DR. CHRISTIAN SAID THAT THEY WERE CONFINED TO THE FIRST FLOOR WHICH WAS OTHERWISE UNOCCUPIED. HE SAID THE CONTINENTAL PALACE ACROSS THE SQUARE SEEMED EQUALLY UNOCCUPIED. CHRISTIAN ALSO SAID THAT HE NOTED A REDUCTION IN THE POPULATION OF SAIGON.

8. BOTH MEN HAD LOST CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT DURING THEIR CONFINEMENT AND SEEMED SOMEWHAT DAZED AND CONFUSED TO EMBASSY OFFICERS.

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